

PATTERNS OF POWER · THEORY · THE WESTERN CASE

A Bishop No King Could Make

*How One Structural Accident Gave the West an Interpreter Its Rulers
Could Not Appoint, What the Reformation Actually Did to It, Why
Nationalising It Produced Absolutism Where It Stayed Singular and
Bargaining Where It Fragmented, and Why Ideas Are Selected From a
Menu Nobody Wrote*

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Preface: what this study is

The collaboration, the paper it re-reads, and the promise that it stands alone.

This study belongs to the Patterns of Power project and is a collaboration. The questions, the direction, the pattern-recognition and the final judgement are the author's; the historical synthesis, the drafting and the scholarly retrieval were done with Claude, Anthropic's model, with every load-bearing claim checked against a source before anything was built on it.

The project is not an attempt to prove a theory. It is a search for structural dynamics behind one question — how a distribution of holdings taken by force becomes an order armed men will defend rather than contest — and the cases that break the framework are worth more than the ones that confirm it.

This study grows out of an earlier paper in the project, *The Permanent Reformation*, which argued that Western political development was driven not by better ideas reaching wider audiences but by successive elite factions reaching for available legitimating frameworks — amplifying the ideas that served them and starving the ones that did not. That observation stands. What the present study adds is a **constraint** the earlier paper did not have, and a **variable** that turns its central claim about Western distinctiveness from an atmosphere into a measurement.

The constraint is that factions cannot feed arbitrary material. The property that makes a body of belief usable as a ground of title — *no current claimant made this* — is a fact about history rather than a feature anyone can add, so **the menu is written before any faction arrives**. Feed and starve explains which of the available options wins. It cannot explain why the options exist, and the options existing is precisely what constrains the winners.

The variable is where the interpreter's qualification is issued. On that measure the Latin West holds a position nothing else in this project's archive occupies: for roughly a thousand years its interpretive class was credentialled by an office **outside the reach of every ruler in it**. That single fact accounts for a great deal that is usually attributed to culture, and it makes the Reformation legible as something other than a liberation — as the nationalisation of a foreign credential, executed by different routes in different kingdoms, with consequences the framework predicts and the record confirms in a pattern that is sharper than the usual account allows.

The study stands alone. No prior reading is assumed — not of this project, not of European history, not of any doctrine or scholar named. Every term is built from scratch.

Two disclaimers. This is a structural reading and not a claim about anybody's sincerity: the project brackets interior states on principle, because they cannot be observed and because the mechanisms it studies are invariant under them. Luther's convictions, Henry's, Cromwell's and Locke's are not at issue here, and nothing below should be read as saying that religious reformers were secretly about power. And the study takes no position on any doctrinal question.

One discipline governs throughout. The period examined includes the wars of religion, the burning of dissenters by every confession that held a state, the suppression of the English radicals, and constitutional settlements that authored property in human beings. This project states the obligation in the phrase *legibility is not pardon*, and discharges it in Part XII rather than in a clause.

The question

One scene, and the fact that it happened nowhere else.

In January 1077, at a castle at Canossa in northern Italy, the Holy Roman Emperor waited outside in winter weather seeking absolution from a pope who had excommunicated him and released his subjects from their obedience.

Set that beside the rest of this project's archive.

The Ottoman religious establishment was appointed and dismissed by the sultan, salaried by him, its colleges endowed by him, its ranks administered from his palace. It produced no Canossa, in six centuries.

The Chinese interpretive class was constituted by an examination in which the state set the syllabus and the pass list. It produced remonstrating officials who objected magnificently and died, and no institutional capacity to compel — in more than two thousand years.

The Classic Maya *k'uhul ajaw* held, permanently and by title, the office of Keeper of the Holy Books; the Hawaiian chief carried the sacred force in his own body; the Türk khagan read heaven's favour off his own victories. None of these orders produced any equivalent, and on the framework's reading none of them could have.

So the question is not why Europe developed liberty. It is narrower and answerable: why did one civilisation produce a scene in which a ruler could be made to wait, and what became of the arrangement that made it possible?

The answer this study defends is a single structural fact with no moral content whatever. **For roughly a thousand years, the men who read the ground in Latin Christendom held a qualification no ruler in Latin Christendom could issue or revoke** — and the whole of what is usually called the West's distinctive political trajectory, including the parts that look least like liberty, follows from what happened to that arrangement.

The framework, compressed

Possession, ownership, the anchor, the interpreter.

Everything below rests on a distinction ordinary speech collapses. **Possession** is what force holds now. It is present-tense and expires when the capacity sustaining it expires. **Ownership** is a claim about the future and about other people: that this will be mine tomorrow while I sleep, and that when I die you will treat my son as its holder. Ownership is not a relation between a person and a thing; it is a structure of expectations about how other people will behave across time. Force is sovereign over the first and impotent over the second, so **the part of a holding force cannot reach must be manufactured out of something that is not force.**

The coordination failure. Everyone in a world of armed men would prefer a settlement, and that explains nothing, because the question is why one holds when breaking it would pay. The decisive calculation is the **bystanders'**: each asks whether a seizure is his quarrel, and absent a common ground of title the answer is no — intervening buys casualties and an enemy, and intervening alone makes him the next target. So all wait, each knowing the others reason identically. **Warlordism is a coordination failure among the men who might have punished it, not a moral failure.**

The anchor. Give every holding one source and the arithmetic inverts: an attack on any title becomes an attack on the ground beneath all of them, and a coalition forms that nobody has to lead. From which the condition that organises this study: **a party competing for the spoils cannot be the author of who gets them**, because a title granted by a competitor is a forecast about that competitor's health. So the source must be **unforgeable by the current claimants.**

Where the material comes from. That property — *no current claimant made this* — is a fact about history rather than a feature of design, and facts about history cannot be added later. A ruler can build the temple, endow the priesthood and stage the ceremony; he cannot make it true that he did not. So the material must come from before the players existed, made for something else. Biology calls the pattern **exaptation**: feathers long predate flight and appear to have served insulation and display — flight did not cause feathers, flight found them.

The interpreter, and his two jobs. An anchor does not read itself. Somebody says what it requires, and that class exists structurally, because specialisation divides

knowing as well as labour, so each person must delegate most of what he holds to sources he cannot check.

That class does two separable jobs. **The vertical job is telling the apex no** — refusing him, denying him, declaring an act unlawful — and it requires that the apex cannot revoke his standing. **The horizontal job is making every holder's title checkable against one source**, so an attack on any registers with all, and it requires only that he be **singular** — not brave, not independent.

Capture destroys the first almost immediately and leaves the second untouched. Which is why bought clergies are compatible with centuries of stability, and why an order dies not when the priest is bought but when a **second author of title** appears.

And the measurable variable, which this study is about:

Who can revoke the qualification that makes this man's reading authoritative? Fused, where the claimant is his own interpreter. Domestic, where the ruler appoints, examines, licenses or funds. Foreign, where the qualification is issued outside the reach of any domestic claimant — the only position from which a refusal can be survived, because it is the only one in which the punishing instrument is held by nobody in the room.

Part I — The menu nobody wrote

What a faction can and cannot feed.

Before the historical argument, the constraint, because it governs the whole of it. The earlier paper's mechanism is real and well evidenced: factions facing institutional constraints reach for legitimating frameworks that justify what they are doing; the frameworks that gain state backing survive and flourish; the frameworks that threaten the winners are suppressed, marginalised or incorporated in neutered form. Fed and starved.

What the framework adds is that the reaching is easy and the making is impossible, and the difference is the whole game.

A faction can amplify. It can endow chairs, license printers, fund preachers, prosecute rivals and put its preferred reading in the schools. What it cannot do is **manufacture a ground that will hold**, because the property required is the absence of the very act it would be performing, and every witness to the manufacture retains permanently the observation that destroys it: *I watched them make it*.

The record is a graveyard of the attempts. Diocletian sacralised his own person and founded nothing that outlived his abdication. Henry VIII made himself Supreme Head of the Church in England and his own daughter demoted the title within a generation. Akbar, the Mughal emperor, with an army, a bureaucracy, a court theologian and no rival authority in his territory, could produce not a decree in his own name but an **attestation in which other men declared that his judgement bound them** — the most powerful man in South Asia needing somebody else's handwriting, and the failure legible in the grammar of the document.

So the menu is written in advance, by people who were not playing. Cosmologies accrete over generations out of genuine attempts to understand and order the world, revised by nobody in particular and attributed to no one — which is the only known way to produce a thing with no author, and which cannot be run on purpose because running it on purpose disqualifies the output. **Cynicism is parasitic on prior sincerity.** An instrumental elite can capture, staff, fund and live off such a stock for centuries; it cannot make one.

Which yields the correction the earlier paper needs, stated as plainly as possible:

Feed and starve explains which of the available options wins. Availability explains why the winners had to say what they said.

And the earlier paper's own evidence is the demonstration. Nobody commissioned the doctrine that scripture alone is authoritative; it was lying in the tradition and had been argued over for centuries. The English revolutionaries did not announce new rights; they argued that **ancient** ones had been violated — the rights of Englishmen, the ancient constitution — because a claim that is old passes every test a claim that is new fails. Even the most radical figures in the American founding wrote in the idiom of entitlements already possessed and merely denied.

That is not rhetorical preference. It is the constraint, visible in the output. A faction that could have written its own warrant would not have needed to argue from antiquity, and every one of them argued from antiquity.

Part II — The accident

How one civilisation ended up with an interpreter its rulers could not appoint.

The West's peculiarity was not designed and nobody chose it. It is the residue of a collapse.

What Constantine did, and what he could not foresee

In the fourth century a Roman emperor adopted a formerly persecuted religion and began the process by which it became the empire's official cult. Read structurally, that is the ordinary move this project finds everywhere: an apex retrofitting a belief already forming in his population rather than minting one, because minting is impossible and retrofitting is cheap. The material was already on site; the emperor picked it up.

What made the Western case different was not that act but **what happened to the state that performed it.**

In the eastern half, the empire continued for another millennium, and the emperor's relation to the church remained what an apex's relation to an interpretive class normally is. Patriarchs were appointed and deposed with imperial involvement; councils were summoned by emperors; the credential sat inside the state's reach. That is the **domestic** position, and the Eastern record shows the domestic signature — no Canossa, and no sustained institutional capacity to compel an emperor.

In the western half, the state failed. The imperial apparatus dissolved across the fifth century and the political landscape fragmented into successor kingdoms, none of which had the reach of the thing that had gone.

And the church did not dissolve with it. It survived the state that had adopted it — with its own hierarchy, its own transmission of qualification, its own lands, and a bishop at Rome whose standing was not in any of the successor kings' gift.

That is the accident. **The interpretive class outlived the apex, and the successor apexes were too small to recapture it.** A single emperor might have; a dozen competing kings could not, because each would have had to overcome not only the church but every rival who preferred the church uncaptured.

What the position actually consisted of

By the high medieval period the arrangement had four features, and the framework's variable reads all four.

The credential was issued abroad. Bishops held spiritual office through a chain terminating at Rome — outside every kingdom in Latin Christendom, and therefore in a place no king within it could reach.

Nobody in the system could appoint the appointer. The pope was elected by a body no monarch controlled, and the elaborate insulation of that election — its enclosure, its procedures — is precisely what a system builds when it is trying to keep a catchment out of a claimant's hands.

The institution had independent means. Lands, revenues, and an economy of endowment that no single ruler's treasury controlled. This project's finding on funding is that perpetual endowment is the most independent form and terminable grant the least, and the medieval church held the former at scale.

And it was corporate. Councils, synods, chapters, orders — bodies with procedural standing distinct from any individual occupant. That matters for a specific capacity examined in Part VI: **a fork can only be repaired by a body with standing that is not one of the forked parties**, and the West had such bodies while most of the archive does not.

One qualification

The picture should not be romanticised, and the framework does not require it to be. Kings interfered constantly, bought bishops, extracted revenues, promoted relatives, and frequently got what they wanted. Popes were captured by factions, by Roman families, and for a long period by the French crown at Avignon.

The claim is not that the church was pure. It is that no single king could revoke the qualification — which is a structural fact independent of anybody's conduct, and which is the only thing the framework's variable measures.

Part III — What a live vertical function looks like

Canossa, and the silence everywhere else.

The framework's prediction for a foreign credential is specific: the vertical function is **live**, because a refusal can be survived. Not that refusals will be frequent, or that the interpreter will be virtuous, or that he will win — only that the move exists.

The medieval West is where the move exists, and the evidence is a class of events that appears nowhere else in this project's archive.

The Investiture Contest. Between roughly 1075 and 1122 the papacy and the German emperors fought a sustained constitutional war over who appointed bishops — not a quarrel over a particular appointment, but a dispute about the location of a power. It produced excommunication, the release of subjects from allegiance, rival claimants to both offices, decades of intermittent warfare, and the scene at Canossa in 1077.

It ended in 1122 with a settlement that **divided the office in two**: the emperor conferred the temporal endowments, and the church conferred the spiritual office. Read that as a structural document and it is remarkable. The parties were unable to resolve who held the credential, so they split it — and the half the church kept is the half the framework says matters, because it is the half that determines whether a man is a bishop at all.

Becket. An English archbishop opposed his king over the jurisdiction of church courts, fled to France, appealed to the pope, returned, and was killed in his own cathedral in 1170 — after which the king performed public penance and withdrew the disputed provisions. Note the specific structural fact: **the archbishop had somewhere to go**. He could leave the kingdom and continue to hold his office, because his office was not the king's to withdraw.

And the comparative silence is the evidence. Nothing of this kind occurs in the Ottoman record, or the Chinese, or the Mughal, or the Safavid, or the Maya, or the Inca, or the Hawaiian. Those orders had learned men, courts, doctrines and occasionally spectacular individual defiance. What they did not have was an office whose holder could refuse an apex and still hold the office the next morning.

The point is not that Latin churchmen were braver. The framework insists on this because the alternative reading is both flattering and wrong. A refusal that ends the refuser's career, income and successor's appointment will be made occasionally by heroic individuals and will never become an institutional capacity, because institutions learn. What Latin Christendom had was not courage but **survivability** — and survivability was a fact about issuance, not about character.

Part IV — The nationalisation

Two kingdoms, one objective, and the route that decided which became Protestant.

Now the study's central reframing, and it turns on a document signed seventeen years before the English break.

The Reformation is ordinarily told as the breaking of a monopoly on spiritual authority. The framework reads the political half of it differently and more narrowly: **it was the conversion of a foreign credential into a domestic one, kingdom by kingdom** — and the confessional route a given kingdom took was substantially determined by whether its ruler had already obtained the credential by other means.

France got it by treaty

In 1438 the French crown, following a national synod at Bourges, issued a statement of principles that placed the nomination of bishops and senior ecclesiastical dignitaries in the hands of the king and princes and required French church affairs to be settled in France. It was contested and never fully enforced.

In **August 1516**, following a decisive French military victory in Italy the previous year, Francis I and Pope Leo X signed the **Concordat of Bologna**. It gave the French crown the right to nominate archbishops, bishops, abbots and priors — enabling the crown, by controlling the personnel, to determine who led the French church. Canonical ordination remained with the pope, preserving a formal veto. **The arrangement regulated church-state relations in France for the next two hundred and seventy-five years.**

Score that with the framework's variable and the answer is unambiguous. **After 1516 the French credential was domestic.** The king chose the men. The pope retained a formality that could be exercised occasionally and could not, in practice, be used to staff the French church against the crown's wishes.

And the consequence is drawn in the standard scholarship without any theoretical apparatus at all: **because France's rulers did not feel weakened by the church's power structure after 1516, they had no direct motive to support the Reformation.**

England had to break to get it

Henry VIII wanted the same thing — control of appointments, control of the courts, control of the revenues, and in the immediate instance a marital ruling. He could not obtain it by concordat, for reasons that were partly diplomatic and partly personal.

So he took it by statute. The Act of Supremacy of 1534 declared the king the supreme head of the church in England; the appeals to Rome were cut; the monasteries were dissolved and their lands distributed.

Same objective, different route. And the framework's reading is that the route was chosen by availability rather than by conviction: the crown that could get the credential inside the existing arrangement stayed inside it; the crown that could not, left.

That is not a claim that the Reformation was *about* this. Popular religious conviction was real, enormous and not manufactured by anybody — Part I is the argument that it could not have been. **The claim is narrower: the political question of which kingdoms nationalised by schism and which by concordat tracks whether the credential was already obtainable without one.**

And the German settlement did the same thing at retail

The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 settled the empire's confessional conflict by allocating the choice of religion to each territorial ruler — a principle later summarised in a Latin phrase that was coined afterwards rather than used at the time, and which should be treated as a later gloss rather than a contemporary formula.

Whatever the phrase, the structural content is exact: **the credential was handed to the territorial princes.** Which is nationalisation, executed several hundred times at once, and it is why the framework treats the German case as the same event as the English and the French rather than as a different kind of thing.

What was actually lost

State it plainly, because the standard account emphasises what was gained.

Before the nationalisation, every ruler in Latin Christendom faced an interpretive class whose standing he could not withdraw. After it, in one kingdom after another, he faced one whose standing he issued.

That is the removal of the only structural constraint European monarchs had ever operated under — and the framework's prediction for the removal of a foreign credential is not liberation. It is the death of the vertical function and the survival of

the horizontal one, which is the configuration that produces an apex with no institutional capacity able to tell him no.

This project has the same finding from a case with no possible connection to it. When a British High Commissioner destroyed the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903 and announced that every emir would henceforth be appointed by him — while pledging not to interfere with the religion — the result was not the preservation of the emirate. **The hands that could check an emir fell from five to one, and indirect rule made the emirate absolute.** The mechanism is identical: take the appointment, leave the doctrine, and the constraint disappears while the coordination continues.

Part V — The split

Why the same move produced Louis XIV in one kingdom and a constitutional settlement in another.

If nationalising the credential produced absolutism, the pattern should be visible. It is — but with a qualification that the crude version misses, and the qualification is the study's most useful finding.

The prediction, and the apparent counter-example

France nationalised in 1516 and produced, within a century and a half, the most complete absolutism in Europe: a monarchy that ruled without summoning its representative assembly for a hundred and seventy-five years, revoked the toleration granted to its Protestant minority, and made the phrase about the state and the king's person the standard shorthand for the arrangement.

England nationalised in 1534 and produced a civil war, a beheaded king, a republic, a restoration, a deposition, and a constitutional settlement that made the crown dependent on parliamentary supply and made the army's very legality subject to annual renewal.

Same move, opposite outcomes. The crude prediction fails.

The variable that resolves it

The framework's two functions supply the answer. Capture kills the **vertical** job and leaves the **horizontal** one — *provided the interpreter remains singular*. The horizontal function requires nothing of him except that he be the single place titles come from.

And that is where the two kingdoms diverged.

France's nationalisation left the credential **singular**. One church, one hierarchy, one set of appointments, all in the crown's gift. The vertical function died and the horizontal function ran at full strength — every holding in the kingdom derived from one place, and that place was the king. Which is the configuration the framework says produces maximum freedom of action at the apex and no protection against him.

England's nationalisation **fragmented** it. Within a generation the country contained a state church plus Puritans within it, plus Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and others outside it, plus a persistent Catholic minority. A state church that a large fraction of the politically active population rejects cannot make every title checkable against one source, because a substantial part of the population does not accept the source.

So the English crown got the vertical constraint removed and did **not** get the horizontal function consolidated — which meant it had to keep bargaining, and the parties it bargained with had somewhere to stand, because the confessional fragmentation had produced rival readings of the ground that could not be liquidated by appointing different bishops.

Nationalising an interpreter's credential produces absolutism where it remains singular and bargaining where it fragments.

The wider pattern

The proposition is checkable across the European field, and it holds better than the confessional account does.

Spain ran a domesticated and singular church — royal patronage over appointments in the Indies and extensive control at home, plus an inquisition operating under royal rather than papal direction — and produced a strongly absolutist monarchy.

Denmark nationalised its church at the Reformation, kept it singular, and in the 1660s produced what is generally regarded as the most explicitly absolutist constitution written in early modern Europe, vesting authority in the hereditary monarch in terms few other states put on paper.

The Dutch Republic emerged from a revolt in which no confession achieved a monopoly, ran a public church alongside substantial tolerated minorities, and produced a federal republic with a notoriously weak central executive.

Poland-Lithuania guaranteed religious peace among its nobility by confederation in 1573, remained confessionally plural, retained an elective monarchy, and became the European byword for a crown that could not act.

Four cases, and the sorting variable is not which confession won but **whether the credential ended up singular or plural inside the polity**.

One honest caution

The correlation is real and the causal direction is not clean. Confessional plurality and weak central authority reinforce one another: a crown strong enough to impose uniformity does so, and a crown that cannot impose it is thereby revealed as weak. So plurality may be an effect of weakness as much as a cause of constraint.

The framework's partial answer is that the **timing** in the English case runs the right way — the fragmentation was produced by the Reformation and the constitutional constraint came a century later, with the crown at its strongest in between. But one case is not a control, and this is the study's most serious analytical weakness.

Part VI — The fork that was institutionalised

Why the contest never terminated, and what the West did that other orders could not.

The earlier paper called its subject the **permanent** reformation, and the framework can now say why the permanence is structural rather than rhetorical.

What a fork is

When an authority divides — two holders of the same qualification, each declaring the other invalid — the failure requires nobody to do anything wrong. Coercive capacity divides without loss, since half an army is still an army. **Authority cannot**, because an authorisation is a statement that something is *uniquely* so, and two sources make it a statement about which source you asked.

And force cannot settle it, because seizing an office whose whole value is its non-seizability destroys the thing seized.

This project's finding is that a fork is repaired by one combination and no other: **an outside power with a floor, willing to compel the parties into a room, plus a donation of legitimacy from inside** — one claimant conceding in a form that transmits his standing to the process rather than to a rival. And that inside donation requires **a corporate institution with procedural standing that is not identical to any occupant**.

The West had the machinery, and used it, and then stopped using it

Latin Christendom had forked before. When the papacy itself divided at the end of the fourteenth century into two and eventually three claimants, the fork was eventually repaired — by a council, backed by secular power, with a claimant's concession transmitted to the process. An earlier attempt without both halves had merely produced a third pope.

So the West possessed a repair mechanism, and it worked once. Which is exactly what the framework predicts of a corporate interpretive class, and which most of the archive lacks: the Türk khaganate, with no interpretive institution at all, split at its first

contested succession and could not be mended; the Maya, with scribes drawn from the royal lineage and no body standing across polities, saw divine kingship dissolve rather than be amended.

At the Reformation the repair failed, and the West did something else instead: it institutionalised the division.

Augsburg in 1555 did not decide which reading was true. It converted an unanswerable question — *which is the true church* — into a settled question with an administrative answer: *which applies where*. Westphalia in 1648, after a war that killed a large fraction of the population of central Europe, extended and entrenched the same move.

That is not a repair. **It is a permanent fork with a filing system**, and it is the structural fact underneath everything the earlier paper called permanent.

Why permanence follows

Single-ground orders have one settlement and periodic turnover of the men occupying it. Factions inside them contest *who holds the office*, and this project has found that contest running in Iran three times in forty-seven years without anybody once attacking the ground itself, because nobody can forge it and nobody gains by breaking it.

A two-ground order is different in kind. A faction losing on one ground can appeal to the other. Which means the contest cannot terminate, because there is no single source whose verdict closes it — and it means every subsequent claimant inherits a toolkit rather than a doctrine.

That is the earlier paper's "unusually rich toolkit for narrative appropriation", stated as a structural condition rather than a cultural one. **The West's distinguishing feature is not two traditions in the abstract. It is a fork it could not mend and learned to administer** — and permanent contestation is simultaneously the price and the product.

And the byproduct the earlier paper identified follows without needing to be intended. Where two grounds compete for the same population, neither can suppress the other's arguments completely, because suppression in one territory drives publication into the next. Competition between anchors produces, as a side effect nobody chose, an argumentative space — which is a considerably less flattering account of the origins of open enquiry than the standard one, and considerably more robust.

Part VII — Why the radicals lost

The suppression evidence, and the mechanism underneath it.

The earlier paper's most compelling section is the one on what was suppressed: the Levellers' demand for a broad male franchise and equality before the law; the Diggers' communal cultivation; the radical religious movements of the 1640s; and, in the American case, the more egalitarian programmes present in the revolutionary coalition and absent from the constitutional settlement.

Its explanation is that these threatened the property arrangements the winning faction required, and that the selection was political rather than intellectual. That is correct as far as it goes. **The framework can say why the ground could not protect them**, which is the part that generalises.

They had no ground the winners could not also claim

The Levellers argued from natural right, from the rights of Englishmen, and from the ancient constitution. So did their opponents. Both sides at Putney in 1647 were reading the same ground, and neither stood outside the contest.

An anchor cannot arbitrate between two men who are both holding it. Arbitration is precisely the act that requires somebody who is not a party — and when every reader of the ground is a claimant, the ground has as many readings as there are claimants and no way to choose among them. What remains is the floor.

Cromwell had the floor. The Leveller leaders were imprisoned, the mutineers among them were shot at Burford in 1649, and the Digger communities were physically dispersed.

The comparison that makes it structural

Set that beside Becket, five centuries earlier. An archbishop opposed his king, and had **somewhere to appeal to** — an office outside the kingdom, which could receive him, keep him in orders, and pronounce on his cause. The king could kill him and could not unmake him, and the penance that followed is the measure of what the foreign credential was worth.

The Levellers had nowhere. There was no office outside England to which an English subject could appeal against an English government, because **England had abolished the foreign credential a century earlier**, and had done so at the crown's initiative and for the crown's reasons.

The Reformation is what made the suppression of the English radicals structurally available. Not by any intention of the men who made it, and not because anybody planned it: they removed the only address in the system that was not held by a party to domestic contests, and a hundred years later a domestic contest was decided with no address available to the losing side.

That connects the earlier paper's two halves causally rather than thematically, and it is a finding neither paper had.

And the American version

The same reading applies with the signs changed. The abolitionist claim was fully consistent with the natural-rights ground the founders invoked, was present in the revolutionary coalition, and was compromised in the constitutional text to hold the slaveholding states inside it.

There was no interpreter outside the contest to say the ground meant what the abolitionists said it meant. The interpreters were domestic — appointed by the apex, confirmed by the legislature, sitting on a bench whose size the legislature set — and in 1837 that bench was expanded by two seats via circuits drawn so that a majority of justices would cover slaveholding territory, and the justices thereby added supported the decision holding that Black Americans could not be citizens.

The catchment was edited, lawfully, and what it produced was Dred Scott. Which is the framework's cheapest instrument, used successfully, on the question the earlier paper identified as the central suppression of the American founding.

Part VIII — What a fed doctrine later authorises

The blowback the feed/starve account cannot accommodate, and the mechanism that produces it.

The earlier paper's strong claim is that ideas are the dependent variable — that factions select the frameworks serving their interests and institutionalise them. The evidence for that is good. What the account under-explains is what happens **next**, and the framework has the mechanism.

The material has to be old and public, and old public things can be read by anyone

A ground works because it is unforgeable and because it is common knowledge — everyone holds it, and everyone knows the others hold it. Both properties require that it be **out in the open**, and antiquity is what makes it pass. Which means a faction that feeds a doctrine has fed something it does not own, cannot revise at will, and cannot restrict to the readings that suit it.

So the doctrine outlives the faction's interest in it, and is available to whoever comes next.

The natural-rights framework was fed because it authorised property against the crown and made a case for resisting a distant legislature. The same framework then authorised abolition — using the founders' own ground, quoting their own document, against their own successors — and won. The English constitutional language of ancient liberties, fed by seventeenth-century property-holders against a king, was available a century and a half later to men arguing for a franchise those property-holders had spent blood to prevent.

The audit runs on the believers, not the intellectuals

The mechanism is not that better arguments eventually prevail. This project has a finding from an entirely different setting that supplies it.

A legitimating language recruits exactly the coalition that believes it, and the most committed recruits to any framework are people produced by disillusionment at asymmetry — formed inside a word, they collided with the gap between it and the

conduct of the men administering it, and took the gap as the scandal their formation taught them it was. Which means the recruits arrive **pre-selected for the one faculty that delivered them**: the ability to see a gap between a word and its administrators.

They do not lose the faculty on arrival. They aim it at their new leaders.

That finding was derived from exit interviews with defectors from a twenty-first-century organisation, who left saying not that they had stopped believing but that the leadership did not represent what they believed. **It applies with the same force at civilisational scale and on a generational lag**, because a doctrine that has been fed into schools, pulpits and public argument for two generations has produced a population that holds it — and holding it is exactly what enables the comparison between the doctrine and the conduct.

A faction cannot control what the doctrine it feeds will later authorise, and the reason is not moral progress. It is that the doctrine had to be old and public to be worth feeding, and old public things are readable by the people it was fed to.

That is the cost of using material you did not make, and it is the counterpart to the constraint in Part I. The menu is written by others; and once you have chosen from it, the dish is not yours either.

Part IX — What this does to the materialist account

Where the earlier paper is right, and the one place it is not.

The earlier paper sits in a line of argument running from Marx through Gramsci: that ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class, that a dominant group secures consent through the institutions of civil society, and that political change is driven by material interest rather than by the migration of better ideas.

This project agrees with a great deal of that and disagrees on one point, and the disagreement is narrow and decisive.

Where it agrees. Capture is real and is the normal condition of an interpretive class — this project says so repeatedly and the whole of Part IV is an account of one. The apparatus of transmission is real, and the description of church, school and press as the machinery by which a picture of the world is installed is very close to this project's own account of what it calls the seam. Material conditions constrain which cosmologies can exist and spread. And consent is cheaper than coercion, which is this project's entire measure of a successful settlement.

Where it disagrees. On origins. If ruling ideas were simply what a ruling class produces when it needs them, then Diocletian, Henry and Akbar had the means, and the means were not enough. The property required is *no current claimant made this*, and that is a fact about history rather than an output of power.

So:

The materialist account is a good theory of what happens to a body of belief after it exists, and a bad theory of where it comes from.

The two are reconciled by separating the questions. **Feed and starve is a theory of selection and it is largely right. The found-ground argument is the theory of origin it needs to be complete.** A faction selects from a menu it did not write, feeds what suits it, starves what does not — and is then bound by the material's own properties, which include being old, being public, and being readable by everyone it was fed to.

And one further consequence for the earlier paper's central question. It asked why the West's trajectory was distinctive and answered: a dual legitimating infrastructure, accidentally embedded, giving factions a richer toolkit.

The framework's version is narrower and testable. Not two traditions in the abstract, but one measurable structural fact: **for a thousand years the West's interpreter held a credential no ruler in it could issue** — the only such case in this project's archive. Everything the earlier paper attributes to the dual infrastructure follows from that, including the competition, including the argumentative space, and including the fork that could not be mended and had to be administered instead.

Part X — Predictions

Stated so that they can fail.

P1 — Vertical function tracks issuance, not culture. Across orders, documented instances of an interpretive body constraining an apex and surviving it should appear where the credential is issued outside every domestic claimant's reach, and should be absent where it is domestic or fused — regardless of the tradition's content, the interpreters' learning, or the population's piety. *Falsified if* sustained institutional constraint is found in orders whose interpreters were appointed and funded by the apex.

P2 — Rulers who can obtain the credential by negotiation do not break; rulers who cannot, do. Across the sixteenth-century field, the confessional route taken by a crown should track whether it had already secured effective control of appointments through concordat or custom. *Falsified if* crowns with concordat control broke at similar rates to those without.

P3 — Nationalisation produces absolutism where singular and bargaining where fragmented. Polities whose interpretive credential became domestic and remained confessionally singular should show stronger apex authority and weaker representative institutions than polities where nationalisation produced confessional plurality. *Falsified if* singular-credential polities show comparable constraint on their executives.

P4 — Forks are repaired only by a corporate body plus an outside floor, and otherwise administered. Divided authorities should be mended where both are available and institutionalised or fought out where either is missing. *Falsified if* forks are commonly repaired by force alone, or by parties to the dispute.

P5 — A losing faction with no external address is suppressed rather than accommodated. In domestic contests, factions arguing from the same ground as the winners, with no office outside the polity to appeal to, should be suppressed at markedly higher rates than factions with such an address. *Falsified if* external appeal makes no difference to the survival of losing factions.

P6 — Attacks come through the catchment. Where an interpreter's office is filled by procedure, moves against it should take the form of lawful alterations to the eligibility rule — size, selection, jurisdiction — rather than defiance of its rulings, because the second triggers a coalition and the first historically does not.

P7 — Fed doctrines turn on their feeders on a generational lag. Doctrines amplified by a faction should, within two to three formed generations, be used against that faction's successors by people the amplification produced — and the users should argue from the doctrine's own terms rather than from a rival framework. *Falsified if* successful challenges characteristically come from newly-imported doctrines rather than from the incumbent one.

And the account fails as a whole if this is found: a civilisation whose interpretive class was appointed, funded and structurally controlled by its rulers, and which nonetheless produced sustained institutional constraint on those rulers over centuries — or a faction that successfully installed, within its own lifetime and over the recorded objection of the surrounding interpretive establishment, a wholly new ground that became load-bearing and cheap to run.

Part XI — Where this is weak

Eight problems, three of them serious.

The causal direction between confessional plurality and weak monarchy is not established. Part V concedes this and it deserves repeating first, because it is the study's most exposed claim. A crown strong enough to impose uniformity does so; a crown that cannot is thereby shown to be weak. Plurality may be an effect of weakness rather than a cause of constraint, and the English timing argument is one case rather than a control.

The route-determines-confession claim is over-clean. Part IV argues that crowns able to obtain the credential by concordat stayed inside the old arrangement. France fits and the scholarship supports the inference. But Spain also had extensive royal control and stayed Catholic; the German princes had varying degrees of control and split by other factors including dynastic rivalry, imperial politics and genuine conviction; and Scandinavia broke without the marital circumstances of the English case. The claim is at best a partial explanation of a heavily over-determined event.

The study brackets sincerity, and bracketing may be doing more work than it admits. The Reformation was a religious event with enormous popular content, and an account that treats the confessional question as a function of appointment control is examining one channel of a much larger phenomenon. The bracket is defensible — interiors are unobservable and the mechanisms are invariant under them — and it is also a decision to look away from most of what happened.

The medieval church's independence is overstated by any clean model. Kings extracted, appointed, and got their way constantly; the papacy was captured by factions and for seventy years sat under French influence at Avignon. The framework's claim is only that no *single* king could revoke the qualification, and a critic could reasonably say that a credential which every king could bend and none could break is a weaker instrument than this study makes it sound.

"The West" is doing too much work as a unit. The study slides between Latin Christendom, particular kingdoms, and a civilisational trajectory, and those are different objects. Some claims hold at one level and not the others.

And three that reach the foundations.

The first. **The comparison set is this project's own archive,** which is a collection of orders selected by an author interested in this question, and the claim that no other

civilisation produced a Canossa rests on the absence of evidence in a set nobody assembled to test the proposition. Islamic history contains episodes of jurists constraining rulers; the Confucian tradition contains sustained remonstrance; and whether those cross the threshold this study draws is a judgement I have made rather than a measurement.

The second. **The framework's account of the Reformation is unfalsifiable in the form usually stated**, because any outcome can be described after the fact as singular or fragmented. What would make it a test is a scoring rule for confessional singularity applied before outcomes are consulted — proportion of the politically active population outside the established church, say, at a fixed date — and no such coding has been done.

The third, and the most uncomfortable. **A study arguing that the West's liberties were a byproduct of an administrative accident is telling a story with obvious appeal to a particular sensibility**, and appeal is not evidence. The account here is deflationary about a heroic narrative, and deflationary accounts are as capable of being wrong as flattering ones — and are more likely to be believed by people who wanted them to be true.

Part XII — The excluded, and the discipline

Who paid for each stage of this.

This project requires every study to name the people inside an order's coercive reach and outside its settlement.

The medieval arrangement this study credits with a live vertical function was the same institution that authorised crusade, that presided over the expulsion and massacre of Jewish communities across the same network of bishoprics and monasteries that carried the coordination, that established inquisitorial procedure, and that authorised the partition of two continents and their populations between two crowns without reference to anybody living there. The framework's own standing finding applies without amendment: **the machinery that lifts a society above warlordism is the same machinery that, captured, commits atrocity at scale**, and its capacity for the second is proportional to its competence at the first.

The **nationalisation** was executed on people. The dissolution of the English monasteries turned out their occupants and destroyed institutions that had run hospitals, schools and poor relief. The confessional settlements that this study describes as an administrative achievement were reached after wars that killed a large fraction of the population of central Europe, and were preceded and followed by the burning of dissenters by every confession that held a state — Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican in turn.

The **suppressed** are the subject of Part VII, and the framework's structural reading of why they lost should not obscure what losing was. The Leveller mutineers were shot at Burford in 1649. The Digger communities were destroyed, their crops and dwellings pulled down. The radicals prosecuted, the printers imprisoned. And in the American case the compromise that Part VII describes as a coalition-holding measure was the constitutional protection of property in human beings, extended for twenty years by explicit provision, and enforced by federal law against states that would have freed them.

And the **excluded from the whole arrangement**: the Jewish communities of Europe, whose position was defined by a Christian order throughout the period this study examines and who appear in it as the standing exception to whatever settlement

was in force; the enslaved of the Atlantic system, whose status was authored by the same natural-rights ground that Part VIII credits with turning on its feeders; and the populations of the territories divided under the authority Part II describes as impressively far-reaching.

On the vocabulary. This study has called human beings a *population*, a *coalition*, a *formed generation* and *material*, and has described the wars of religion as a fork being administered. That register is chosen because vagueness about mechanism has protected more atrocity than it has prevented, and because a civilisation is easier to celebrate than to describe. The register makes suffering sound like a variable, and the debt should be paid once in plain words. The people burned for reading the wrong text were people. The men shot at Burford believed they had won a war for something. And the argumentative space that Part VI describes as an unintended byproduct of confessional competition was purchased with a century and a half of killing.

Legibility is not pardon. To show that a trajectory was structurally produced is to say something about the structure and nothing whatever about its justice.

Conclusion

One accident, one nationalisation, and a menu nobody wrote.

The earlier paper in this project observed something true and important: that in every Western transformation, factional winners reached for available legitimating frameworks, amplified what served them, and starved what did not. Fed and starved, and the selection was political rather than intellectual.

What the framework adds is that **the reaching is easy and the making is impossible**, and the difference is the whole game. A faction can endow chairs, license printers and prosecute rivals. It cannot manufacture a ground that holds, because the property required is *no current claimant made this* — a fact about history that no resources can supply, and whose absence is legible in the grammar of every attempt. Diocletian founded nothing. Henry's headship was demoted by his own daughter. Akbar could obtain only a document in which other men attested that his judgement bound them.

So the menu is written in advance, by people who were not playing — which is why the Reformation argued from scripture, the English revolutionaries from ancient liberties, and the American radicals from rights already possessed. Every winner in that record had to say his ground was old, and the compulsion is the constraint made visible.

And the West's distinctive trajectory turns out to rest on one structural fact rather than on a culture. **When the western empire failed, the interpretive class outlived the state that had adopted it, and the successor kingdoms were each too small to recapture it.** The result was a credential issued abroad, held by an office no ruler in Latin Christendom could appoint or remove, funded by lands no single treasury controlled, and administered by corporate bodies with standing apart from any occupant.

That is the only case in this project's archive of a **foreign** interpretive credential, and it is why one civilisation produced a scene in which an emperor waited in the snow, and a fifty-year constitutional war over who appoints bishops, and an archbishop who could flee a kingdom and still hold his office. Not because its churchmen were braver. Because a refusal could be survived, and survivability was a fact about issuance.

The Reformation is the nationalisation of that credential, and the route each kingdom took was largely a function of whether the thing could be had without one.

France obtained the right to nominate its bishops by concordat in 1516 and had no further need to leave; England could not obtain it and took it by statute in 1534; the German settlement of 1555 handed it to each territorial prince at retail. Same object, different routes.

What was lost was the only structural constraint European monarchs had ever operated under — and the framework's finding is the one it reached independently in a colonial case four centuries later and half a world away: **take the appointment, leave the doctrine, and the constraint disappears while the coordination continues.** Indirect rule did not preserve the emirate; it made it absolute.

But the outcome split, and the split is the study's most useful finding. **Nationalisation produced absolutism where the credential stayed singular and bargaining where it fragmented.** France kept one church in the crown's gift and produced Louis XIV. England produced a state church that a large part of its political nation rejected, which left the crown with the constraint removed and the coordination unconsolidated — so it had to keep bargaining, with parties who had somewhere to stand. Spain and Denmark ran the French pattern; the Dutch Republic and Poland-Lithuania ran the English one further.

And because the fork could not be mended, it was **administered** — 1555, then 1648 — converting an unanswerable question about which reading was true into a settled question about which applied where. That is why the reformation was permanent. A single-ground order contests who holds the office; a two-ground order can never terminate the contest, because a faction losing on one ground appeals to the other. The argumentative space that followed was a byproduct nobody chose and nobody could have commissioned, and it was purchased with a century and a half of killing.

Two things follow that are worth carrying.

The first is why the English radicals lost, and it is structural rather than moral. **They had no ground to appeal to that the winners could not also claim.** Both sides at Putney read the same text, and an anchor cannot arbitrate between two men who are both holding it — so the answer came from the floor, and Cromwell had the floor. Five centuries earlier Becket had somewhere to go: an office outside the kingdom that could receive him and keep him in orders. The Levellers had nowhere, because England had abolished the foreign credential a hundred years before, at the crown's own initiative and for the crown's own reasons.

The second is the cost of using borrowed material. **A faction cannot control what the doctrine it feeds will later authorise** — not because better arguments prevail, but because the doctrine had to be *old and public* to be worth feeding, and old public

things can be read by everyone they were fed to. Natural rights were amplified to authorise property against a crown and were used, within three generations, by abolitionists quoting the same documents. The believers a word recruits arrive with the faculty that recruited them, which is the ability to see the gap between a word and the conduct of the men administering it, and they do not lose it on arrival.

Which is the sentence to carry out of the whole thing, and it holds for a fourth-century emperor, a sixteenth-century king and any faction that has ever fed an idea because it suited them:

You may choose from the menu. You did not write it, and once the dish is on the table it belongs to everyone who can read.

A note on sources and scholarship

Every borrowed idea is explained in the text rather than invoked on authority; this note gives the references and the reservations.

On the framework. Possession and ownership, the anchor and its properties, the bystander mechanism, exaptation and the found-ground argument, the interpreter's two functions, credential distance, the catchment-edit vulnerability, the repair conditions for a fork, and the audit mechanism are developed across this project's theoretical papers — principally *What Force Cannot Do*, which consolidates them, together with *The Shape of the Sieve*, *The Distance to the Sword*, *The Guard That Cannot Be Turned*, *The Belief That Cannot Be Manufactured* and *Before the Furniture*. The underlying scholarship restated in the compressed framework is James D. Fearon on commitment problems (*International Organization*, 1995), Barry R. Weingast on coordination and shared standards (*American Political Science Review*, 1997), Michael Suk-Young Chwe on ritual and common knowledge (*Rational Ritual*, 2001), and Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth Vrba on exaptation (*Paleobiology*, 1982).

On the paper this study re-reads. *The Permanent Reformation: Elite Factions, Narrative Capture, and the Real Engine of Western Political Change* (this project, 2026), for the feed-and-starve mechanism, the account of successive factional appropriations from the Reformation through the construction of liberal democracy, the suppression evidence, and the identification of Constantine's synthesis as the source of a dual legitimating infrastructure. That paper's own sources include Karl Mannheim on the sociology of knowledge, Antonio Gramsci on ideology and hegemony, and the historical sociology of Charles Tilly and Michael Mann. This study supplies the origin constraint, the credential-distance reading, the concordat-versus-schism account of the nationalisation, the singular-versus-fragmented split, the fork-administration reading of Augsburg and Westphalia, the structural account of the radicals' suppression, and the blowback mechanism. The earlier paper is left standing as written.

On the materialist account. Karl Marx, preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859); Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (written 1845–46); Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (1929–35), for hegemony and consent through civil society; Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970). The

disagreement is confined to origins and is set out in Part IX; the fuller treatment is in this project's *The Belief That Cannot Be Manufactured*.

On the medieval arrangement. The survival of the western church through the collapse of the western imperial administration, the development of papal authority over episcopal appointment, and the insulation of papal election follow the standard historiography. The Investiture Contest of roughly 1075–1122, the events at Canossa in January 1077, and the Concordat of Worms of 1122 dividing spiritual investiture from the conferral of temporalities, follow the standard accounts. The Becket controversy, the archbishop's exile in France and appeal to Rome, his killing in 1170 and the king's subsequent penance and withdrawal of the disputed provisions, likewise. The characterisation of these as evidence of a *live vertical function*, and the argument that survivability rather than courage is the operative variable, are this project's.

On the nationalisation. The Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges of 1438, issued following the synod at Bourges, placing nomination of bishops and senior dignitaries with the king and princes and requiring French ecclesiastical affairs to be settled in France; and the **Concordat of Bologna of 18 August 1516** between Francis I and Leo X, negotiated after the French victory at Marignano, confirming the French crown's right to nominate archbishops, bishops, abbots and priors while reserving canonical ordination to the pope, and regulating church-state relations in France for the following two hundred and seventy-five years — were checked against the standard reference accounts for this study. The observation that France's rulers, not feeling weakened by the Catholic power structure after 1516, had no direct motive to support the Reformation is drawn from that same literature and is the load-bearing external support for Part IV.

The English Act of Supremacy of 1534, the restraint of appeals, the dissolution of the monasteries, and Elizabeth's demotion of the title to Supreme Governor in 1559 follow the standard record. The Peace of Augsburg of 1555 allocating the confessional choice to territorial rulers, and the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, likewise; the Latin phrase commonly used to summarise the Augsburg principle is a later coinage and is treated here as a gloss rather than a contemporary formula, in keeping with this project's diligence rules.

On the comparative field in Part V. French absolutism, including the long lapse of the Estates-General and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685; Spanish royal control over ecclesiastical appointment and the crown-directed inquisition; the Danish constitutional settlement of the 1660s establishing hereditary absolute monarchy; the Dutch Republic's public church alongside tolerated minorities and its weak central executive; and the Polish-Lithuanian Warsaw Confederation of 1573, elective

monarchy and constrained crown, follow the standard reference literature. The sorting variable proposed — singular versus fragmented credential rather than confession — is this project's, and the causal caution in Part XI stands.

On the English radicals. The Putney Debates of 1647, the Leveller programme, the imprisonment of its leaders, the shooting of the Leveller mutineers at Burford in May 1649, and the destruction of the Digger communities at St George's Hill and elsewhere in 1649–50, follow the standard historiography, on which the earlier paper also draws.

On the American material. The constitutional compromises over slavery, the 1837 expansion of the Supreme Court via circuits drawn to cover slaveholding territory, and the subsequent decision holding that Black Americans could not be citizens, are treated with their own sourcing in this project's study of the American case, *Nine Without an Army*.

On the audit mechanism. The finding that a word recruits the coalition that believes it, that its most committed recruits are produced by disillusionment at asymmetry, and that they retain and redirect that faculty, is developed in this project's *The Audit of the Faithful* and applied to a contemporary case in *Before the Furniture*.

On what is not attempted. This study makes no claim to original historical research in medieval or early modern European history, which it enters as a visitor and in which it relies on the standard literature and on this project's earlier work. It takes no position on any doctrinal question and makes no claim about the sincerity of any historical actor. Its contribution is analytical: to supply an origin constraint the earlier paper lacked, to replace an atmospheric account of Western distinctiveness with a single measurable variable, and to identify what the nationalisation of an interpretive credential did to the orders that performed it.